

Final Transcript

CARTER BUMPERS PHONE

June 29, 2009

PRESENTATION

Susan Hello. Uh.. is this Melissa?

Melissa Yes, and Mrs. Carter's on the line.

Susan Hi, Mrs. Carter. This is Susan Martin from AAP. Mrs. Carter, can you explain how you and Mrs. Bumpers became so interested in immunization?

Mrs. Carter Well, Betty became interested first and she worked with the Centers for Disease Control to um develop a program that became a model for the other states in the country. She was in Arkansas, and our husbands were governors at the same time. So when we went to governor's conferences, all the- the wives got together to - all the governors were men back then - and uh talked about what we were doing and Betty got me and other governors' wives really interested in um immunization and actually came to Georgia to help me start a program in Georgia.

And um that's how, that's how we became the- the— That's how we began uh.. the involvement in- in measles immunization then working together. And when I say “measles,” I mean all immunizations. I just always say “measles immunization.”

Eh.. and um.. not many children were— there were— I think this is the next question. Can I just stop right there?

Susan Oh, sure. Uh, were many children not getting their vaccines at that time?

Mrs. Carter Well, um the Centers for Disease Control estimated that there were about 20 million children uh that were behind on their vaccinations and there were large gaps betw- in immunizations among the poor and minority populations. And at that time, it just happened that um new vaccines were getting to be developed. Uh, rubella vaccine was new and the Centers for Disease Control was leading um, um a program to educate um people about the new vac- vaccines and about the need to be vaccinated and um they appealed to the governors' wives uh to help. And um and it was really um successful because um the- uh Bill Bumpers, Betty's husband, got busy and- um working to help with the funding.

husband was al- already in the Senate when we got to Washington and I was there about two weeks when she called and said, “Let’s work on measles in the whole country.” And so, we visited all the states. We really worked hard working with governors and governors’ wives and- and legislators and- and were successful. That was one of the- one of- an accomplishment that I’m really proud of.

Susan

Mrs. Carter, what were some of the other goals of the administration?

Mrs. Carter

Well, I think— I was really interested in children and getting children a good start and Jimmy was, too. And so, that was one of ‘em - to reach 90% uh immunization levels. Um and we worked hard at that and I remember going to Arkansas when Betty Bumpers was the first one to get that done in her state and uh.. Hillary’s uh Bill Clinton was President. So, Hillary had a reception for us and like the bills say, he was the head of the Centers for Disease Control and he was there and we announced that— had a big reception and announced that uh the levels were up to 90% of children immunized in Arkansas. That was a big achievement and we were- we worked um in all the states, trying to do that and were successful in- in some of them; many of them, I think.

And the other thing was just es- establish um just a permanent system that would pro- provide comprehensive services for children, um the- the

children born each year in our country just to be sure they got a good start. I know that as- as far as immunizations um are concerned, we- we did work um to get them by school age, but um we finally- we realized that- that once that was done, but this was later when we left the White House. Um so, I go back to that; um to establish a permanent system to provide comprehensive services to the children born in our country every year.

And one of the things that he- that we were able to accomplish was the WIC program, the Women and Children's program for services for- for newborn babies and so, those were, working with little children was one of the main goals that help provide them a good start anyway.

Susan

Mrs. Bumpers, can you talk about the founding of Every Children by Two, including how you came up with the name and what is the significance of age two as far as vaccines are concerned?

Mrs. Bumpers

Well- <clears throat> well, we were extremely successful in getting all the school— I mean the school laws changed, as Mrs. Carter said, in all 50 states so that school enterers had to be fully immunized. Uh that was a very great and good accomplishment, but we also did a bad thing in that we - <clears throat> that effort helped change the mindset of people in the country that you wait until school age to have your child immunized and not at the proper time of birth to uh two years of age.

So, we had a big epidemic in uh 1980, I believe it was, or '81 and lost oh close to 200 youngsters and 85% of them were under the age of five. So, we suddenly realized, and through the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control, we decided to start a new program uh to try to reach, you know- to try to reeducate people to the proper immunization age and that was birth to two.

So, Dr. Fahey, we were working with him, always under the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control who guided our every step and uh Dr. Fahey was Head of the Office of Child Health Affairs at the Carter Center at the time and- and so, we're still working very closely with him. He's the one that came up with the title, "Every Child by Two" - T-W-O.

So, that was our- that was the title of our new organization and so then we started going- doing the same thing all over again, Mrs. Carter and I - visiting all the states, helping set up— Through- through AAP, through all of the child health programs and Centers for Disease Control, we set up, and the governors' wives and we still had many friends in the governors' offices and knew all- a lot of them. <Clears throat> And those that we didn't know, we got acquainted with.

So, we did the whole thing over again, only it was for Every Child by Two, to reeducate people, to start at age- at birth to two years of age to immunize their children. And um.. we're still going very strong. We are the, I would say, probably the major spokesperson now for immunizations from birth to two years of age.

Mrs. Carter Um, can we have Betty say that first sentence over because the im- the epidemic was in 1990? It started from 19- late '89 to '91 and Betty, you said 1980 or '81.

Mrs. Bumpers Oh, dear. Oh, well. Okay.

Mrs. Carter That's when we were still there.

Susan Why don't you say that again and also, was it a measles epidemic, or what uh?

Mrs. Bumpers Yes. Yes, it was a measles epidemic.

Susan Okay. Well, I'll just ask you the question again and you can say that first line again.

Mrs. Bumpers All right- all right, and I'll try to do better. Okay.

Mrs. Carter That's just the first line.

Susan We're happy to do uh do overs. Um.. Mrs. Bumpers, talk about what prompted the founding of Every Child by Two and how you arrived at the name and- and the significance of age two as far as vaccines.

Mrs. Bumpers Well, while we had been very successful in getting all of the states to pass laws that mandated children school- entering school be vac- be immunized, uh it did a wonderful thing so that, it, that is still, of course, still in place. All children have to be fully immunized by the time they start school, but it did a bad thing in that it shifted people's thinking away from the proper immunization age, which is birth to two years of age, to waiting until the preschool clinics, or, you know, just before they start the school.

And so, in 1990 and '91, we had a massive uh measles epidemic in this country and it affected; 85% of the children it affected were under the age of five. So, suddenly, the Centers for Disease Control alerted us, uh Mrs. Carter through Dr. Fahey who was then Head of the Office of Child Affairs at the Carter Center and she called me one day and she said, "Betty, what are we gonna do about all these babies dying?" And so, I sort of got back in gear and asked her how much time she could give me.

And so, we started, through the help of Dr. Fahey, Every Child by Two - T-W-O. It was his suggestion that we name our new organization Every Child by Two.

And so, then we started doing the same thing, using the same methods of um contacting, going into the states, getting um governors' wives, any highly visible uh child health organization or agency to work with us, forming coalitions to do an education program on immunizing infants from birth to two years of age to change that mindset.

And, the levels were extremely low for that. In fact, I remember Houston. The first, one of the first places that we went to was Texas because Houston had a 14% level of children birth to two years of age fully immunized and that was, that was kind of reflective of all over the country because people had just, you know, waited till school age to immunize their children.

So, we had to do this whole new um education of of the public out there that that birth to two years of age was the proper immunization age. And so, we worked all these years now, since 1990 - '91 I guess - '91 and '92 is when we really got in full gear, and uh we are still working very diligently and often, the two of us, uh through our organization and our

executive director, Amy Pisani, uh to educate people to, you know, the proper, the proper age for immunizations.

Susan Uh, I think you answered the next question in there as well, which is just, that's perfectly fine. Is there anything that you'd like to add about the picture of the nation's immunization program um in the in the early '90s? Are there- were there any other challenges that you saw? You mentioned uh very low um levels of- of children who are fully immunized. Was that the main challenge that you face?

Mrs. Bumpers Yes, that is the main challenge, or or just keeping people educated. It's not the main challenge right now. Right now, the main challenge to us is to educate people that vaccines are safe and effective and they have nothing to do with causing autism or any other ill-effects. I mean the vac; we we need to continue to lend our voice and we are continuing to do so in many ways through Every Child by Two uh to keep the people educated and informed that vaccines are safe, effective, and a a, you know, it's the 21st Century's greatest achievement I think, and that's um vaccines. So, we are still working at it.

Susan Um.. Mrs. Carter, uh maybe both of you can answer this question. What has Every Child by Two accomplished? What are you most proud of

having done, and and how does the um nation's immunization program look today compared to when you started?

Mrs. Carter

Well, we at Every Child by Two work uh with a team of, we work on a team effort um because we get involved, get other nonprofit organizations involved, medical associations, immunization programs, the Centers for Disease Control; everybody that's involved with immunization we are in contact with and the rate's now at an all time high um and Congressional funding is the highest it's ever, it has ever been and that was one of the other main problems when um we were working as we have worked over these years because the funding would fluctuate up and down um and um about the distribution and purch purchase of vaccines and just, there didn't seem to be uh anybody leading the effort to keep the Congressional um people, the members of the legislature, the national legislature and the state legislature uh educated about what was going on.

New vaccines had come along, so many of them. Children have to have more uh immunizations today. There's a lot that people need to learn and as Betty said, um to to make sure that that mothers know that um that children need to have their immunizations by age two.

Um and so, I think we've really worked hard. We've we've um brought the um subject to the attention. We, we tested uh Congressional staffs, as well as well the legislators uh in states and um in the national Congress.

And, um another thing that we've done is um to, we put on a campaign to develop registries in every state in the country so that every child is registered when they have a vaccine. There's a lot of problems with uh children going to a clinic and lost, the records have been lost and they don't know whether they've had a vaccine- a particular vaccination or not. And so, sometimes children get too many um immunizations.

Um so, registries in states are really important and if, the registries have to be uh comprehensive with public and private um providers um complying um so that we have all of the records and- and the registry is um in some process in every state of the country now. Um coalitions exist in every state now. Betty and I have been in and out of these states over the last years.

Um healthcare providers; we have worked with them so that any time a child comes into a clinic, um the immunization records should be, be checked, no matter what they come for and we want providers not to miss the chance to immunize a child while uh the ch- child is there. And so, we, those are the kinds of things that we've been trying to um get across in our country, just an immunization program of the general public, the providers, and to stay in touch with um.. Congressional members um so that that issue is always in front of 'em.

Mrs. Bumpers

I, I think one other thing that I would like to add is that uh by using our visibility as uh former governor's wife and former senate wife and as the former President of or First Lady of the nation that we have been able to involve all of the Presidents since then in the awareness and programs for immunizations, and they've been of highlight. In fact, President Clinton started the uh VFC.

Uh it has been, we have kept it on the front burner. We've been able to keep it on the front burner uh through all the administrations and through- and we still do a lot of uh lobbying with uh new senators and Senator Reid sort of took up the mantle after Senator Bumpers retired and he still leads some of the Senate, you know, uh coalition to keep the funding up.

So, we have been able to accomplish a great deal, I think, by staying with this program, but uh steadfastly keeping the goal in mind uh and that is to get, as Mrs. Carter said, the registry <clears throat> in place so that we have a record and thankfully, President Obama is emphasizing the fact, you know, of electronic medical records and we have a head start on that through all of our work.

The fact that we have worked with in with existing organizations and agencies, both state and federal, that are already in existence through the AAP; you know, through all of the organizations that have to do with

children. So, I feel like it's been a very, very successful program and will continue to be so, has uh, you know, has very strong, very good credibility now.

We have a wonderful Web site that informs and we have a wonderful young executive director and- and a very small staff who do a great deal of work, and uh it's just been a, been a great program and we will continue on it as long as we can keep walking and breathing and our minds intact.

Susan

I'd like to ask you one more question that wasn't on here, but it just occurred to me, um, Mrs. Bumpers and and, Mrs. Carter, if you want to answer this as well. Kind of what— I know you said there was an epidemic in the- in the '90s, um but on a personal level, what, what drew you to this so much that you, you decided to commit so much time to promoting immunization? Um did something make an impact on you, a story that you saw or something that you met, or, or why did you decide to um just really make this one of your top priorities?

Mrs. Bumpers

Well, if I may, I'll answer that for myself. I knew, I mean I was a teacher, school teacher, elementary school teacher. I saw uh children that had rubella syndrome from having had as we call them German measles and then when I realized that as my husband became governor that we had this new vaccine for rubella for months, for uh, let's see, whooping cough.

Uh I had seen all of that in my, growing up in a small town I think it's the same as Mrs. Carter, that we, you know, we live next door to kids that had these uh syndromes, you know, from childhood diseases and we could see the devastation that it caused and created even in our own children, how sick they were with measles.

So, it was just a real interest of mine in being very involved and interested in, as an early childhood educator, in young children. And so, when the opportunity presented itself, it was, it's been a passion of mine and continues to be so, to see to it that young children get every advantage that they can have to start out life in uh good health.

Mrs. Carter And, Betty got me involved. I was really interested in it because I, too, had seen my children uh suffer with measles and, um and I started this campaign in Georgia and we worked through um homemaker clubs, I think, that used to be part of um the agricultural program, Betty?

Mrs. Bumpers Yes, home extension. It used to be—

Mrs. Carter Home extension, and that was getting together the, the parents, the mothers in those homemaker clubs across the, across my state, um and just educating them about them. As Betty said, rubella- rubella vaccine was

new then and and I and others were really concerned about rubella because there were um there was a surge of it uh in the country.

And so, it was not really hard at that time to get people, um women, mothers um to come to the meetings and um after; and then when we got to the White House and other states didn't have programs requiring immunizations by school age um it was, it was just really important and I- I guess I got hooked on it with working in, in Georgia on the issue and uh and just realizing the importance. And to me, it is, it is so unnecessary for the children to have these diseases when the immunizations, and they can, they can be prevented and I just um I, I guess I just developed a passion. Uh I, I guess Betty's passion is catching, but I from my own experience too.

And um so, um that's why when Jim was Presidents that's why we still keep um working. It's been really interesting over the years because there will be an outbreak like in—

Mrs. Bumpers The state sets up the programs uh that will be most effective in their state.

Mrs. Carter Hmm, we've done, we've done a lot of work in Nevada recently the last few years in other states and being um being current, up-to-date on the laws too and purchasing vaccines and distributing vaccines.

Susan All right. I think we're back up um, Mrs., sorry about that delay. Mrs. Carter, um do you want to just begin again where you were talking about your, your passion for this issue and you were mentioning how it's unnecessary for children to have these diseases?

Mrs. Carter Um I think from my experience uh in my own state uh working with um women primarily uh to be sure that children were immun- immunized at the proper age um helped me become um so involved in the issue that when I got to the White House and Betty came to see me, I just was really thrilled at the chance to be able to work on a nationwide basis. And when I realized that um states did not have requirements for immunization, all states did not, by school age, um I think I said earlier that that was a real shock for me. And to me, it is so important for parents to have their children immunized.

We, I, I, Betty and I have worked so long to try to prevent this unnecessary suffering for children and I know all parents want that. And and vaccines today are safe. They are effective and they save lives. There's, um in the epidemic when we first started Every Child by Two, uh over 100 children died and um it's a, very serious illnesses can now be prevented and, and to me, uh not to try to educate people and let them know that and let them know how important it is when I have some um

public voice um, maybe not very strong, but, but when I worked at it and go places, particularly with Betty because she's so fervent about it, too, um it, it um, it just makes me feel like I- something that is so important and if I can do anything about it then I want to.

Susan Mrs. Bumpers, how did you and Mrs. Carter end up working so closely together for so long?

Mrs. Bumpers Well, of course, as we have said before, our husbands uh were governors during the same four years and I got involved through the Centers for Disease Control and set up this program and then after President Carter was elected, one of the first people... to say is one of the first people knocking on the front door of the White House was Betty Bumpers uh wanting her to be involved with me. And, this is true.

So, <clears throat> the next thing I know, after visiting with her at the White House and getting a tour of the living quarters, the private living quarters upstairs, which was an ulterior motive on my part, uh <clears throat> two weeks later, President uh I mean uh after— Excuse me. Two weeks after my initial visit with Mrs. Carter asking her to help me make this a national program in Arkansas - a national program – uh Secretary Califano, who was President Carter's designee for the Centers for Disease Control called me and said, "The President tells me not to make a move on

immunizations until I've talked to you." And I- so I said, "Aha, pillow talk does pay."

So, I know that that Mrs. Carter had talked to the President about it. And so, that's how we became so deeply involved in this because he recognized it as a significant program, the President did. Secretary Califano did. And so, this is how we got the ear of the national agencies, you know, through Secretary Califano to listen to us and to help us, to help set up programs for us to lend visibility to the program. And so, this is how we got all 50 state, uh we visited all 50 states.

I mean it was a commitment on the part of President and Mrs. Carter to get this accomplished, that set it up and we have continued to work hard at it and we feel like it has been very successful and that it's a uh major accomplishment in our lives and as well as the lives of many hundred of thousands of children in this country and we still stay at it.

Susan As you both watch kind of what's said about vaccines in the media and you hear from parents, what, what do you think new parents really need to know and understand about vaccines?

Mrs. Bumpers They need to know and understand that vaccines are safe and effective and they do not cause other forms of illness except in very rare cases. Uh, you

know, every time; nothing is ever 100% perfect, but the percentages on any kind of vaccine injury are so minimal and so few and besides that, we have an agency that's set up to take care of any vaccine injury, any legitimate vaccine injury that goes through a very pro- very credible process. And so, parents need to know how important it is to immunize their children, to safeguard them against so many diseases and that there are new vaccines coming along all the time that have been wonderfully tested through long testing periods.

I mean the fact that the AARP, that all of the children's uh organizations and agencies in this country are held accountable; I mean they hold themselves out as backing these vaccines. So, parents just need to know that we are, that the scientific world is taking care of their children and that they should take advantage of it in order to save lives, to save injuries, to save misery for children and uh we just need to keep educating parents about this.

Mrs. Carter

And, and parents don't need to worry about um any after effect from immunizations because they do not cause any chronic disorders and the chance of- of any kind of um injury or, are so minimal - one in two million. I mean it just doesn't happen. Um, and so, parents just need to know how important it is because even if we don't, if we have um immunized all, every child in, well, almost all the children in the country

and there are some that are not. There are people coming in from overseas. There was one little girl who came in to California. She'd been uh overseas and she was exposed to measles. She came in, in, she infected seven people, different people who then went their own way and infected others and a little epidemic started.

So, on airplanes, anywhere you have your children, they're in danger of- of um becoming infected from somebody else and um, and parents just it's just so important for parents to immunize their children and not um be afraid, that um it will, it will only help them. It won't hurt them.

Susan Okay. Um, just one moment. Mrs. Bumpers, could you say; in one, in that last answer, you said AARP. I believe you meant to say AAP. Could you just AAP now? We can add it back in. We can edit it in.

Mrs. Bumpers All right, that we have worked uh diligently with the AAP uh in all of the states and continue to work with them.

Susan That's great. That's perfect. We can put that in.

Mrs. Bumpers All right.

Susan Um I will edit this and I'm happy to send you a transcript or the audio file um for review if you'd like. Um, I should have this up on our Web site hopefully within the next couple of weeks.

Mrs. Bumpers Well, just make sure it goes to our executive director.

Susan Amy. Yeah, I work with Amy all the time. She's, she's great. So, I'll keep in touch with her.

Mrs. Bumpers So, for our archives, because we have all of these archives in the University of Arkansas in a special collection that will be housed there, it is housed.

Susan Okay. Great. Um, well, thank you both very much. I hope you have a good day.

Mrs. Bumpers Thank you.

Susan Okay. Thank you. Bye.

Mrs. Bumpers Bye-bye.